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History of Lotteries and the Lottery System in Rhode Island

John Russell Bartlett

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**HISTORY OF LOTTERIES
AND
THE LOTTERY SYSTEM
IN
RHODE ISLAND**

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John Russell Bartlett

**With An Introduction By
Russell J. DeSimone**

**University Library
University of Rhode Island
2003**

This book is published in conjunction with *Rhode Island Lotteries – Three Centuries of History*, an exhibition held at the University Library, University of Rhode Island in April 2003.

All illustrations from the collection of Russell J. DeSimone

Foreword

The information to follow regarding the history of lotteries in the State of Rhode Island provides a unique background on how and why lotteries were instituted. Today's Rhode Island Lottery was created by Constitutional Amendment on November 6, 1973. Legislation was passed in March of 1974, and the Lottery began in May of 1974. Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the Lottery was not to fund education. The original purpose was to make up for revenue lost from allowing the value of a trade-in automobile toward the sales tax liability on a new automobile.

Obviously, the scope has changed over the years, with all of the Lottery's proceeds going to the State General Fund. The General Fund supports almost every aspect of life in our State, from education and health care to public safety and the environment. In addition to the money generated for the General fund, there are the sales commissions paid to the hard-working Lottery Retailers; those business establishments, restaurants, and small stores across the State where Lottery products are sold. So the story certainly does not end with the purchase of a lottery ticket, rather it is the just beginning of the many ways funds are channeled back into the local economy, ensuring that all citizens benefit from the Lottery, whether they play or not. As a business, the Rhode Island Lottery has a responsibility to maximize revenues while maintaining the thrust and best interest of the citizens of the State of Rhode Island. It has always been, and will continue to be, the Rhode Island Lottery's goal to achieve both.

I would like to thank Russell DeSimone for bringing this project to our attention and allowing the Lottery's participation. I also thank Paul Gandel, Vice Provost for Information Services, Dean, University Libraries, University of Rhode Island, for hosting this historical exhibition. Through their efforts and research, the history of lotteries in our State has been documented and preserved.

Gerald S. Aubin
Executive Director
Rhode Island Lottery

Preface

“Rhode Island Lotteries – Three Centuries of History”, an exhibition presented at the University of Rhode Island’s Library, documents the role that lotteries played in Rhode Island’s history. The exhibit and this companion publication illustrate the surprising and colorful ways lotteries have been used over the last three centuries to support public activities in Rhode Island. The University of Rhode Island’s Library is delighted to host the exhibition. We hope that this historical look at lotteries in Rhode Island will help place current discussions on the role of state lotteries into a clearer light. Both the exhibit and this publication were made possible through the generous support of the Rhode Island Lottery Commission. We wish to thank Mr. Gerald S. Aubin, Executive Director of the Rhode Island lottery Commission, and his staff for the loan of key materials for this exhibit.

Paul B. Gandel
Vice Provost for Information Services
Dean, University Libraries

Introduction

The history of lotteries in 18th and 19th century Rhode Island is interesting yet little of its significant role in everyday life is known today. In a time when taxation was limited, hard money in short supply and banks non-existent, it fell to the lottery to be the primary method of raising funds for a variety of civic and religious projects. From 1744 to the end of the Colonial period, the Rhode Island General Assembly authorized almost as many lotteries as all of the other 12 English colonies combined. In fact the legislature authorized nearly 250 lotteries by the year 1842. This is an impressive number when one considers the size of the state and that the new state constitution prohibited them altogether. The role of lotteries in providing the revenue for public works, such as the building, repair and maintenance of roads, bridges and wharves was significant. They were also used by towns as well as civic and religious societies to provide the necessary capital to build school and meeting houses, churches, Masonic halls and armories. Lotteries were also used for a variety of innovative purposes including payment of personal debts of the citizenry and in one case for the payment of a ransom. Toward the end of their existence in 1842, lotteries were the primary source of revenue for the nascent public schools of the state.

The year 1744 did not herald the first lottery in Rhode Island; rather 1744 was the year of the first recorded lottery. Prior to this date lotteries were conducted from time to time but not with the sanction of the colony's government. Certainly lotteries existed here during the 17th and early 18th centuries; the practice having been introduced by the first English settlers. Lotteries were common in Europe during the 1600's and it stands to reason that the practice would be used here as well. Unfortunately no records exist of these early lotteries. The fact that these pre-1744 lotteries existed is evidenced by an enactment during the January 1732 session of the General Assembly, which outlawed them and imposed heavy fines on those who would break the law.

An ACT for Suppressing of Lotteries

WHEREAS there has been brought up within this Government, certain unlawful Games, called Lotteries, whereby unwary People have been led into foolish Expence of Money, which may tend to the great Hurt of sundry Families; and also the Reproach of this Government, if not timely prevented:

For Remedy whereof,

BE IT ENACTED by the General Assembly, and by the Authority of the same, it is Enacted, That no Lottery shall be published or set forth within this Government, from and after the Publication hereof; and that from and after the thirtieth Day of April, Anno Dom. 1733, none shall publickly or privately exercise, keep open, show, or expose to be played at, thrown at, drawn at, or shall draw, play, or throw at any such Lottery, either by Dice, Lots, Cards, Balls, or any other Numbers or Figures, or any other Way whatsoever; and every Person so exercising or drawing any such Lottery, in Manner as aforesaid, shall for every such Offence, forfeit Five Hundred Pounds: To be recovered by Bill, Plaint, or Information, of Action of Law, in any Court of Record within this Colony: One half whereof for the Use of the Colony, the other half to the Informer, or Person suing for the same.

AND be it further Enacted, That every Person that shall play, throw, or draw at any Lottery, after the aforesaid thirtieth Day of April, shall forfeit for every such Offence, Ten Pounds: To be recovered in Manner as aforesaid, for the Use aforesaid. And for the more effectual Suppressing said Lotteries, after the thirtieth Day of April, all Justices, Judges, Sheriffs, Constables, and all other Officers, within their respective Jurisdiction, and hereby empowered and required to suppress and discountenance the same.

In October 1744 lotteries were once again permitted within the Colony with the “leave of the General Assembly.” Until their abolishment in 1842, all Rhode Island lotteries, with one notable exception, were granted by the General Assembly. The exception occurred in 1779 when Maj. General Richard Prescott, commander of the British forces occupying Newport, granted the Loyalist inhabitants a lottery “to carry into execution such measures as may be necessary for the promotion of His Majesty’s service.”

Lotteries prospered throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. Toward the turn of the 19th century, it was common for lottery grantees to sell their grants to lottery management companies and thereby forego the burden of administering the lotteries themselves. Lottery management became big business throughout the country with such firms as Yates & McIntyre and Paine & Burgess rising to prominence. These management companies were responsible for the printing and sale of tickets, the advertisements and oversight of drawings, the disbursement of prizes and the reporting of their sales and commissions due to the state. Lottery offices and their agents appeared in many towns and local town governments collected licensing fees from each agent. These ticket agents advertised extensively in the local newspapers of the day and gave their offices promising names such as: J. Howard’s Fortunate Office and Allen’s Truly Lucky Office, both in Providence and Walker’s Truly Lucky Office in Woonsocket. These lottery offices sold tickets to many lotteries at any given time and were agents for foreign (out of state) lotteries as well.

Lotteries were prosperous ventures. Grantees received the value of their grants in up-front payments. Lottery management companies netted large profits, ticket agents received commissions on each ticket sold, the Rhode Island treasury received a percentage of all ticket sales, town governments received licensing fees and newspapers made huge profits on all the lottery advertisements that appeared in almost every edition. However due to many irregularities, grand prizes were seldom drawn and with only minor government oversight of drawings, the business of lotteries was held suspect to fraud. By the 1830’s anti-lottery literature began to appear, although never published in any of the newspapers that had a lucrative income from lottery advertisements.

Over the next decade anti-lottery sentiment grew. Other states began to prohibit lotteries and following the political turmoil of Dorr’s Rebellion, a new constitution was framed to replace the original Charter of the state. The constitution of 1842 brought a close to future lotteries but allowed existing lotteries to continue until the date authorized for each had lapsed. Due to the wording of the article in the constitution that prohibited lotteries, it was unclear if it also applied to foreign lotteries. It would take another law, passed in 1846, before all lotteries in Rhode Island were a thing of the past.

John Russell Bartlett (1805-1886) was Rhode Island's Secretary of State from 1855 to 1872. During his tenure as secretary of state he wrote and published a number of books and articles on the history of the state. Most noteworthy are his *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, 1856 and *Bibliography of Rhode Island*, 1863. He also contributed to Ethnology with his *Dictionary of Americanisms*, 1848 and after serving as Commissioner of the United States-Mexican Boundary Commission published *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora and Chihuahua*, 1854. Although his writings spanned many topics, Bartlett a native Rhode Islander, wrote extensively on the history of his home state. The articles reprinted in this booklet were published as a series of five newspaper articles in the *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal* from October through December 1856. These articles were the first attempt to relate the history of Rhode Island's lotteries and came only in the decade following the last lottery held in the state up to that time. Now for the first time all five articles are published together. They are presented to the reader today exactly as they were presented to the reader 147 years ago. No attempt has been made to change the quaint 19th century phrasing, spelling or punctuation. Presuming Bartlett's articles will peak the reader's curiosity about the role of lotteries in 18th and 19th century Rhode Island, a bibliography of other recommended reading is provided following the last of Bartlett's articles.

History of Lotteries and the Lottery System in Rhode Island – No. 1
(Manufacturers and Farmers Journal – October 2, 1856)

The lottery system in Rhode Island is of a curious nature in its history, and few are aware of its prominence during a period embracing a full century, during which time lotteries were authorized by law. Circumstances led us lately to look into the subject, and while so doing we noted down a few particulars which we thought would possess an interest for our readers.

Previous to the year 1750, the records of the State are in manuscript, and consequently not in a convenient form for purposes of reference. We do not, therefore, propose to go back beyond the middle of the last century, although lotteries were one of the “institutions” of the colony long before that period. They seem to have been resorted to for all purposes and on all occasions, where the means for effecting a particular object could not be obtained from other sources. The system of voluntary contributions, such as we now resort to for any public measure, seems not to have been practiced; and we presume the good people were unwilling to submit to direct taxation. Perhaps one reason why the people now so reluctantly consent to taxation for the support of the State is, that their fathers and grandfathers for a hundred years or more supported schools, repaired roads and bridges, and accomplished many other things by granting lotteries. But lotteries were not granted for objects of a public nature alone; if a man got involved in serious difficulties and required the aid of or even sympathy of the public, he was shuffled off with a lottery grant, the General Assembly first taking good care that no expense should accrue to the State.

A case of this kind, which is a matter of record, occurred in 1758, and is a curious one. It appears that Mr. Henry Chipman, of Newport, who had carried on the “business of distilling and soap boiling,” had launched out beyond his means by building, in addition to his dwelling house, “a still house, soap house, cooper’s shop, warehouse, joiner’s shop, chaise house and stable, which involved him considerably in debt.” This was quite an establishment for the primitive days of 1758, and certainly showed how enterprising was this ancient town at that period.

“Nevertheless,” continues Mr. Chipman in his petition to the General Assembly, “he had hopes to clear himself speedily by his business, and probably should have done it, had not war come on, which has, in great measure, broke up the business of distilling, and greatly injured almost every other trade. This put the petitioner upon endeavoring to find out another way to clear himself of his difficulties.”

The petitioner now goes on to state that he got a sloop and went to sea, where he was taken by the enemy (the French) and lost all he had, which he adds was “pretty considerable,” but don’t say how much. This sad misfortune “plunged him deeper in debt,” and left him no resort but “to sell his estate;” certainly a very prudent course, and such a one as any honest man would resort to now-a-days. But Mr. Chipman did not like to lose money, and “as no one would give anything like the value of the estate,” he

modestly prays “for liberty to open and erect a lottery for a sum not exceeding thirty thousand pounds.” His petition was accordingly granted and managers of the lottery appointed.

In 1760, an act was passed “for raising \$1200, to reestablish the library lately consumed by fire in the town of Providence,” when the court house was burnt. The preamble states that this “library is of a public nature, tending to promote virtue and the good of mankind.” The scheme is published at large in the schedules. Managers were next appointed, who were required to sign the tickets. Among other provisions in this act is one which entitles “any person who purchases sixty tickets, to all the rights of the library;” and another, that the tickets remaining unsold at a certain time, “shall be equally divided among all the members” to be paid for by them; and that all who refuse to receive and pay for their proportion of such tickets, “shall forever be excluded from, and have no right, benefit or interest in the said library.”

At the same session a lottery was authorized “to raise \$1000 to purchase a lot in the town of Providence whereon to erect a court house,” a pretty moderate sum, and a very good investment. Four months after, it “being found extremely difficult to dispose of the tickets,” a reduction was made in the price. But perhaps it was considered good enough for our little town at that day, when it would appear, from a lottery granted for Newport, that it was by far the greater place. This was for raising, “by way of lottery, the sum of £24,000 in bills of credit of the old tenor to erect a *handsome building*, of two stories, in the Town of Newport; the lower part to be appropriated for a Market House *forever*, and the upper part to be converted into stores and *so forth*.”

In the preamble to this act it is stated that the profits from the rent of the stores are “to be applied to the purchase of grain for supplying a public granary for the use of the town,” which is to be in the same building. “Great advantage to the poor” is anticipated from such a public granary. The managers of this lottery were Henry Collins, Josias Lyndon and Henry Ward. The scheme is published at length, and consisted of 6600 tickets, of which “1865 are to be fortunate,” or, as we should now say, “are prizes.”

In 1761, the town of Providence was authorized to raise by lottery £6000 “to be employed in paving the streets in said town.” At the same session the town of Newport was authorized to raise £6000 by lottery to pave Thames street, in addition to £6000 before raised in the same manner, which sum was “found insufficient” to complete it. Three years after, this pavement became so much out of repair that another lottery to raise £8000 was granted to restore it. Judging from the present condition of the paving in Thames street, it is the same that was put down at the time referred to.

The same year a petition was received from Johnston, stating that there was “no meeting house in that town” – “that the circumstances of the town are low” – and that Mr. Daniel Manton would give an acre of ground for the purpose; whereupon authority was given to raise “a sum of money sufficient to build a meeting house, free for the Baptist Society of the ancient order, to be forty feet long and thirty wide.” What the ancient order was we know not, but our Baptist friends doubtless do.

In 1762, we notice lottery grants to Kent county to raise means to build a poor house, the town "being heavily burdened" for the support of the poor. Of three to the town of Providence to repair its streets, those "at the north end being very miry in many places, which renders it very difficult for carriages to pass." £9000 were to be raised for the latter, and the directors were required to give bond, in double the sum of the lottery, "that no charge should accrue to the Colony." In all cases the directors or managers were obliged to give similar bonds, the economical colonists being determined to avoid all taxes on the government.

The same year the "members of the Church of England, in Providence" petitioned for a lottery, to raise \$1000, "to repair the church and build a new steeple;" which, they add, "if properly finished, will be an ornament to the town." Our forefathers being, doubtless, men of taste in consideration of such an "ornament," were pleased to grant the petition.

The next we notice is a lottery granted to William and Henry Wall, to enable them to raise \$4,500 to relieve them from losses caused by a fire in Newport, "their friends having advised them to petition for such a lottery, that they may have it in their power to assist them in the handsomest manner they can." Lotteries were, during this same year, granted for repairing Woonsocket Falls bridge, to raise £2,000, old tenor; for the repair of highways in Gloucester, £4,000; to the inhabitants of New Shoreham to raise money to open a passage between the great pond and the sea, large enough for coasting and fishing vessels to pass and repass. The petitioners state that since the passage has been closed the cod fishery is uncertain, and that "bass have nearly left the island." These fisheries, they expect, will be restored by opening the passage, and that "great advantages will accrue, not only to this colony, but that to the neighboring governments," and that the people of the island "will reap a great benefit," that they will be enabled to ply a much larger proportion of the times than they are now able to do."

At the same session a lottery was granted to Samuel Dunn to raise £4,500, old tenor, to redeem William Cooke. It appears that Capt. Dunn, in a voyage in the sloop Joseph, from Providence to the West Indies, was taken by a French privateer; which, after pillaging some of the cargo, agreed to ransom the vessel for \$1,000, payable at Cape Francois. For the payment of this sum he pledged the body of his mate. On his way home he lost his vessel and cargo by shipwreck, and was, in consequence, unable to ransom Mr. Cooke. The relative value of "old Tenor" money and silver dollars is shown here. £4,500 of the former only being equivalent to \$1,000 of the latter.

Mr. Nathaniel Helme, late of South Kingstown, had a lottery grant this same year to sell his land and buildings. It appears the petitioner had been the jailor in South Kingstown for eight years, during which time a great number of persons had been committed to jail for small sums, whom he had supported. These persons had been discharged and enlisted in the King's service without paying him. That these losses, and other misfortunes, "reduced him so such that he could not pay his just debts without selling his real estate," and that money was "so hard to raise" that his estate would not bring half its value. Capt. Wells of Hopkinton, was relieved in a similar way, by a lottery grant to sell his goods, to

the amount of £10,000, at cost prices. His misfortunes arose from losses of his vessels, which were taken by the enemy, (the French,) and, he adds, “that he has a large acquaintance in New York and Connecticut, who he trusts, will take off his tickets.”

History of Lotteries and the Lottery System in Rhode Island – No. 2 ***(Manufacturers and Farmers Journal – October 6, 1856)***

The lottery grants of 1763 begin with one to “build a parsonage for the Presbyterian or Congregational Society.” The petitioners, Jabez Bowen, Robert Gibbs, Darius Sessions, John Dexter, and Samuel Nightingale, represent, that “for a long season they have been without a settled Gospel Minister,” and that “to promote their own, as well as the best interest of the community to which they belong, they very much desire to be restored to Gospel order.” That their circumstances are such that they cannot, without the aid of the General Assembly, by granting them a lottery, “lay a sure foundation for a decent support to any worthy gentleman.” They also speak of the encouragement given them by gentlemen in the neighboring governments to buy their tickets, and thereby “bring a real value into the colony.”

Another was granted to Little Compton to raise £6,000, old tenor, to build a wharf at Church’s harbor, the town being “very much reduced in their estates, by reason of high taxes and the failure of their crops, and unable to raise sufficient money for the purpose.” There was also a grant to raise £400, lawful money bills, to build a bridge over Pawtucket river, near Furnace Unity, in Cumberland, where “the inhabitants live thick on both sides of the river, and at many times in the year, for weeks together, there is no passing over with cart or horse.”

Upon the petition of the merchants of Providence, a lottery was granted to raise £90, lawful money, to build a draw at Weybosset bridge, to enable vessels to pass up. The petitioners state that a large part of the town is situated above the bridge, near the water, and that the transportation of heavy goods there is attended by great difficulty and expense. They also remark that where the vessels built above are launched, a part of the bridge has to be taken away to allow them to pass out to sea. This would show that there was water enough to permit vessels to pass above the bridge; in fact, we remember to have heard the venerable William Russell, who, at the time referred to, occupied the house now occupied by Mr. Zachariah Allen, say that his ships from Europe unloaded their cargoes at his wharf opposite.

In this year the inhabitants of Providence asked for a lottery to raise £1000, lawful money, to aid them in opening “the new street running directly west from the great bridge, which wants a great deal of filling up and raising to make it commodious and passable.” They add that “the district is small, and its inhabitants have a great deal of other repairs on their hands.” This is our present Westminster street. The lottery was granted, and Jacob Whitman, Knight Dexter, Phillip Potter and Samuel Low, appointed directors. Lottery grants were also made in this and the eight subsequent years to the following, which are merely noted here to preserve the history: John Franklin had a grant to raise £300, lawful money, to extend his ferry wharf and keep it in repair, as his receipts for ferriage was not sufficient. The town of West Greenwich to build a work-house, and to raise £130, lawful money, therefore. The town of Warwick, to raise £106, lawful money, to repair the bridge at Fulling Mills. To rebuild the great bridge over Pawtucket river, known as Natchecot bridge. To extend Long wharf, in Newport, 170 feet. To build a

work-house in North Kingstown. To repair Whipple's bridge, in Cumberland. To repair Pawtucket bridge. To rebuild Greene's bridge over Pawtuxet river, which had been carried away by a freshet. To repair a road in North Providence. To build abutments to Hunt's bridge. For a road in Glocester. To pave King street, in Newport. To repair the Congregational meeting house in Barrington.

In 1767, a grant was made to raise £150, lawful money, to build a parsonage house for the Baptists in Warren. It appears that the society had built a church and parsonage, but had not quite money enough to complete the latter for the Rev. Mr. Manning, the pastor. Another reason given was, that the reverend gentleman had "under his care several pupils to be educated in the liberal arts, who could not be accommodated in the house" as it then was. The same year a grant was made to Trinity Church, Newport, to raise \$2500, to build a new steeple, the old one "being so much decayed that they were obliged to pull it down," and the expense of building a new one was "too great for them to bear without assistance."

In 1770, "a number of people, religiously inclined, living in the town of Cranston, of the sect called Baptist, whose principles are contained in Hebrews, chap. 6, verses 1 and 2," asked for a lottery to enable them to buy a house for religious meetings, as they were "willing to devote a part of their time to the worship of God," and that they had "for thirty years held their meetings in private houses." Their petition was granted to raise the moderate sum of \$300 by lottery, and Zerobabel Westcott (a good Puritanical name) and Nehemiah Knight appointed managers.

The inhabitants of Providence, in August, 1771, petitioned for a lottery to build a market house on the town's land near the bridge, which was granted. (The present old market near Weybosset Bridge.) They remark in their petition that the people "suffer great inconvenience for the want of a market; provisions being often spoiled by being carried about the streets through wet and heat; and fish rendered more scarce than if there was a proper place to expose them for sale." The managers of this lottery were Moses Brown, William Russell, Jabez Bowen, James Lovett and Benj. Cushing.

It was stated under the date of 1762, that a grant was made to repair the Episcopal Church in Providence, and build a steeple. This year (1771) the wardens of the church, Messrs. John Smith and John Innes Clarke, again petitioned the Assembly for a lottery to enable them to "build a steeple and procure a clock, which are much wanted, and will prove serviceable and ornamental to the town." They had leave, accordingly, to raise \$600 for the purpose. The following year the wardens represented to the General Assembly that the sum received from the lottery had been inadequate to met their expenses, when a further grant to raise \$1000 was given them.

Nicholas Goddard, Samuel Lester, William Arnold and others, in behalf of the Baptist of East Greenwich, received a lottery grant to raise \$1500 to build a meeting house in that town, as "the poverty of the members renders it impracticable to build it without assistance." A grant to raise the same amount was given to the Congregationalist of East Greenwich to build a place of worship, they "having great encouragement from their

brethren in the neighboring governments, that they will assist the petitioners in case they obtain a lottery grant.”

Church steeples seem to have pleased the fancy of our ancestors, particularly when they could be built without taxing the members. This year (1773) a petition was received from the Presbyterian or Congregational Society in Providence, representing that the steeple of their meeting house was sadly out of repair, and must be immediately taken down and rebuilt; that it stood in need of “many other great repairs and alterations,” which the society of themselves were “utterly unable to make.” They further state “that if a tower and steeple, with a clock, be erected in the west end thereof, it will answer extremely well for a town-clock, and be very beneficial to the people who come from the adjacent country to market.” A grant was accordingly made to raise £700; and James Greene, Samel. Nightingale, Jr., Charles Keene, Paul Allen and Nath. Metcalf appointed directors.

Benjamin Wickham, of Newport, merchant, received a lottery grant this year to enable him to sell his “very large dwelling house, wharf, warehouses, &c,” which were under some incumbrances.” – “This estate,” he remarks in his petition, “is so valuable that few people can purchase it, in consequence of the scarcity of money and the decrease of trade.” A year after the General Assembly ordered the General Treasurer to purchase tickets in this lottery to the amount of £50, to satisfy a debt Wickham owed the colony, “as well as to encourage the lottery and thereby relieve the said Wickham.”

Abial Brown, of South Kingstown, petitioned for a lottery to enable him to relieve his distresses, having lost his house by fire, by which “he, with his wife and four small children, were reduced to poverty.” Mr. Brown accordingly got a lift of \$500.

In consequence of a fire which destroyed the buildings connected with a forge in Coventry, a petition was received from John Greene, Griffin Greene, Nathaniel Greene and others, for a lottery to raise \$2,500, to repair their losses, which was granted. They state that “many families were deprived of their means of dependence by the loss of the forge; which also furnished a very material and expensive article for shipping.” Furthermore, “if the forge be not repaired, the anchor works, which still remain, will be in a manner useless.” We believe this to be the celebrated forge which turned out so many cannon and anchors during the revolution.

History of Lotteries and the Lottery System in Rhode Island - No. 3 ***(Manufacturers and Farmers Journal – October 23, 1856)***

In June, 1774, a lottery was granted to raise £2000 to build a Baptist Meeting House. This is the elegant edifice now known as the First Baptist Meeting House. The petitioners represent “that the said Society hath purchased a convenient lot to build a meeting house on for public worship and for holding the public Commencements in,” and that “the purchase of this lot, together with the building a proper house, will be attended with very great expense.” The directors of this lottery were Nicholas Brown, John Jenckes, Benjamin Thurber, Daniel Tillinghast, William Russell, Edward Thurber, Nathaniel Wheaton, James Arnold, William Holroyd and Nicholas Power.—In two months the tickets were all sold, when the directors petitioned for leave to have the drawing take place at an earlier day than that mentioned in their grant.

Mr. Nathaniel Stoddard, Trader, of Little Compton, met with a misfortune this year and petitioned the General Assembly for relief. His case was this, to use his own words; - “In the fall of 1773, he laid out every shilling he was worth, in buying one-third of the sloop Sally and in fitting her for a whaling voyage.” The Sally “at first met with success,” but afterwards she had the misfortune to be seized by a French frigate, which took her to Port au Prince, where, with her whole cargo, she was condemned. Mr. Stoddard stated that he “lost upwards of \$1000” by this operation, and which, he continues, “was all he was worth and had scraped together by unwearied diligence and industry.” Furthermore, the petitioner set forth that he had “a wife and seven small children to support,” whereupon the sympathies of the General Assembly were awakened, and a lottery granted him in view of his growing family to raise \$600 to relieve his distresses.

This same year aid was granted in the way of a lottery, which looks like home protection, to Mr. Jeremiah Hopkins, of Coventry. The petitioner represented that he “sufficiently understood the business of a gunsmith, so as to make guns or small arms with advantage to himself and to others, by whom guns are wanted at this time when they cannot be imported from Great Britain,” but had not the means of supplying himself with tools and such works as were necessary. The aid asked by Mr. Hopkins (only \$200) was so moderate, that his petition was granted; but it was conditioned, that the money raised must be applied “towards the procuring of tools and works, and for no other purpose.”

During this period several minor lotteries, chiefly for public benefits, were granted, among them were the following: To rebuild the town wharf in Warwick; to pave Pelham street in Newport; to finish the Johnston meeting house; to repair various roads; to build a new hospital at Coaster’s Harbor, Newport; to build a Baptist meeting house in Coventry; a school house in East Greenwich; a parsonage house in Pawtuxet, and to repair various bridges and dams. From the years 1774 to 1780 no lotteries were granted except some very trifling ones to repair bridges and dams. This was the period of the revolution, when the minds of the people were occupied with more important matters.

In 1780, on the petition of “divers inhabitants of Providence,” setting forth that it was “very inconvenient” to go from Broad street to Westminster street through Union “for

want of the said street being paved.” A lottery was therefore granted to those who suffered the great inconvenience spoken of, to raise \$30,000 to pave Union street, “any overplus remaining after the work is finished to go to the town.” This grant must have been in a greatly depreciated currency.

Two years later George Hazard Peckham, of Charlestown, petitioned the General Assembly for a lottery to enable him to sell his estates. He stated that he owned a farm and dwelling houses “which he was very desirous of selling, in order to discharge his debts;” “that he had advertised them without effect, and that sickness and other misfortunes” had much embarrassed him. His petition was granted.

Petitions for lotteries increased much in 1783, and continued as before for similar objects. This year the Baptist Society in Newport obtained a grant to raise \$2500 to build a new church, their old one being so much injured from having been used as a Hospital, first by the British and afterwards by the French, as not admit of its being repaired. A grant to raise \$2000 was made to the town of Newport at the same time to enable it to purchase some lots on the South side of the parade for the public use. The petition set forth “that the town was greatly in debt, and having suffered much during the war, was unable to purchase the lots and defray the expense of leveling and enclosing them.” There is a condition in this act that the town shall never erect any building on the land referred to.

The Congregational Society, of Tiverton, petitioned for relief about the same time, representing “that their meeting-house was *improved* during the war, as a barrack for the troops, and greatly injured thereby.” A lottery grant was accordingly given them to raise \$1,500 to repair their building.

In February, 1784, a petition was presented from Providence for a lottery grant to raise £1000, lawful money, to enable the petitioners to build a market-house in the north part of the town, and also a bridge from the work-house lot over to the main street. The petition was granted, and John Whipple, Benjamin Comstock, Samuel Young, William Wheaton and Amos Allen, appointed directors. In the same year a lottery grant was made to the wardens, vestry, &c, of the Episcopal Church in Bristol, to raise \$1,000 to build a church, as their former edifice “was burned by the enemy during the late war;” also to the First Congregational Society in Newport, to raise 1,200 silver dollars, to enable it to rebuild their parsonage, “which was totally destroyed by the British troops; to repair their meeting-house, injured by the same, and to buy a new bell, the old one having been taken away by the enemy.” The Second Congregation Society in Newport received a similar grant the following year, its church and parsonage having been used for hospitals.

With return of peace, after the revolutionary war, there seems to have been quite a breaking up of churches, many of which had been used for hospitals. Others, probably, had been little used during the struggle, when there was evidently a greater effort made to preserve the bodies than the souls of the colonists. But we hear nothing of subscriptions or contributions, as evidences of the outpouring of religious zeal for the restoration of dilapidated churches and the revival of public worship. Nor were taxes resorted to for this purpose; but the good people again returned to the old, and, in their opinion, harmless

method of raising the wind by lotteries. They certainly cannot be charged with extravagance in their places of worship, two or three thousand dollars being generally the extent of their demands.

The "Congregation of the Episcopal Church in Providence" represented that their edifice was "greatly out of repair, and, unless speedily repaired, would be in a ruinous condition." A grant to raise the moderate sum of \$800, by lottery, for the purposes stated, was therefore made; and Cyprian Sterry, Jere. F. Jenkins, William Jones, Thomas L. Halsey and Stephen Deblois, appointed directors. They were required to give bond in the sum of \$8,000 for the faithful performance of their duty, whence, we might infer, the General Assembly feared they had some banking or other speculation in view. It is an interesting feature in the history of lotteries granted by the General Assembly, and shows the great caution of the government, that the monies raised by these lotteries should be strictly applied to the object stated in the petition; and that bonds should be given by highly respectable and responsible men that the State should not suffer, or be held responsible for losses or mismanagement.

A lottery grant to raise £180, to finish the meeting house in Coventry, was passed this same year; but no mention is made of the denomination to which this relief was given. "The Old Standing Baptists," so called, of Gloucester, also got a lift of £300, lawful money, to enable them to build a meeting-house. The "Protestant Baptists," of Hopkinton, having represented that they were "generally poor, by reason whereof the public worship of the Supreme Being was in a measure neglected," got leave to raise "£400, real money, for the express purpose of building a meeting-house."-Trinity Church, Newport, also obtained a grant to raise 1,500 silver dollars to make repairs. They represented that their society had been dispersed by the war, the church gone to decay, the pavement and fences torn up and destroyed.

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The war, which made some rich, proved disastrous to more; but the people had not then an overflowing treasury at Washington to resort to with exorbitant or fraudulent charges to replenish their coffers, the plan since resorted to in Florida, Texas, California, and other parts of the country; nor had they wealthy friends to appeal to, nor banks to borrow of. Their only resort to save themselves from utter ruin was a lottery. The first of this description which we notice is one to Wm. West, of Scituate, who, finding himself in a pretty "tight place," and very much embarrassed, asked for a lottery to enable him to sell his farms and stock. Mr. West seems to have held a good deal of property, as appears by the list presented in his petition, embracing six farms, containing from 227 to 450 acres each; also, "60 good cows, 8 oxen, 5 horses, and 100 sheep." The lottery was granted to Mr. West, and a committee appointed to appraise his lands and stock under oath.

Mr. Geo. H. Peckham, of South Kingstown, came forward at this time (1787) for a little aid in consequence of his "misfortunes by the war, and by a continued sickness of five years," all of which had "reduced him much in his circumstances." The petitioner proposed "to set up the business of sailmaking, but found himself unable to erect a suitable shop and procure the necessary stock." His petition was granted, and a lottery granted him to raise £2,100 of the money emitted by the State in May, 1786.

A few years later a lottery was granted to Pardon Allen, of Exeter, to raise \$250 in specie, to enable him "to erect suitable works on a stream running through his land, for manufacturing all sorts of nails."

The Congregational Society of Little Compton represented to the General Assembly, in 1787, "that they had unanimously made choice of a young gentleman to preach the gospel to them," but that the "calamities of war, and the want of money" obliged them to ask for the benefit of a lottery to raise £600 of the paper money of the State, to build a parsonage, which was granted accordingly.

For the purpose of building Weybosset Bridge in Providence, a lottery was granted in 1790. The sum to be raised is not stated. Wm. Larned, John Dorrance, Andrew Dexter and Samuel Snow were the committee to manage it, and were required to give bonds for £6000 for the faithful performance of their duty. In the year following a grant was made to raise "£900 silver money," to lay out a "straight, handsome and convenient street, east ward of the highway at the north end of the town, "which may be continued towards Pawtucket, nearly straight for about two miles, and greatly accommodate and beautify the north end of said town." Sylvanus Martin, Isaae Pitman, E. Macomber, Samuel Thurber, Benj. Turpin and Stephen Randall were the directors of this lottery.

John Robinson, of South Kingstown, prepared a petition this year (1791) wherein he stated that he had "at a very considerable expense built a wharf at Point Judith, and almost completed a boat and store, which had already proved very useful to the public; that it would make a safe harbor for coasters and promote a beneficial intercourse

between the country and Newport, by extending it 30 or 40 feet into the sea.” A lottery was granted to Mr. Robinson to enable him to extend his wharf. The executors of Nicholas Easton’s estate, in Newport, obtained a lottery grant to sell his property this year; but being unable to sell the tickets it was abandoned.

Lotteries were also granted in this and the following years to St. Paul’s Church, in North Kingstown, “to enable them to put their edifice for public worship in decent and suitable order,” and to raise 625 “silver dollars” for the purpose. To a society in Warren to finish their meeting house (the denomination not stated). To the Catholic Baptist Society, to raise £800 to build a meeting house in Cumberland. A renewal of a lottery to the Congregational Society of Little Compton to build a meeting house. To the Congregational Society on the east side of the river in Providence, to raise \$5000 to complete their house of worship. To St. John’s Church, Providence, to raise \$5000 to build a parsonage. To the congregation of the Rev. Joseph Snow, in Providence, to raise \$4000 to complete their meeting house. To the Baptist Church, in Foster, to raise \$2000 to build a meeting house. To clear Pawtucket River. To build various bridges over Pawtucket River. To build a bridge at Woonsocket Falls. To finish a meeting house in North Providence (name not stated). To repair the north and south roads leading from Providence to Norwich. To raise \$2,500 to pave a street in East Greenwich. To finish the Catholic Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket; and to repair various roads and bridges in the State.

In 1795, a grant was given to Newport to raise \$25,000 by lottery, to rebuild Long wharf and erect a hotel there. The act provided that the rents and profits of the wharf and hotel “shall be appropriated to the building and supporting of one or more public schools in said town.” At the same session a lottery was granted to raise \$4000 for “completing and furnishing a hotel for an exchange, or coffeehouse, in Providence;” which act was suspended the following session, but for what reason it does not appear.

The Beneficent Congregational Society in Providence, in 1796, represented that “by reason of the great alteration made in the street opposite their meeting house, the tower and foundation were in imminent danger of being undermined, and required immediate attention,” that they had been to a great expense “in putting a new roof” on their church, with other heavy expenses, and required some assistance. A grant to raise \$2,500 by lottery was accordingly made them.

This year the Corporation of Rhode Island College prepared a petition to the General Assembly, and, “for various reasons therein assigned,” prayed that they might be “authorized to raise by lottery \$25,000 for the use of said college,” which was granted accordingly.

The United Congregational Society of Barrington, in 1798, was authorized to raise \$3,000 to make repairs on their meeting house; they representing “that the settling of the Gospel in that place, had exhausted their finances,” and that their place of worship must remain in its then ruinous state “unless relieved by the kind interposition of the legislature.”

With these end the lottery grants for the 18th century. Much more might be said of these numerous grants, and the subsequent legislation regarding them. It is evident that all did not go into effect. Some were unable to sell their tickets, and relinquished their grants. Others asked for renewals and for additional classes in order to realize the sums required, while difficulties of various kinds attended others. It would be attended with much trouble to ascertain the precise value of the grants; some being to raise “silver dollars,” others “lawful money,” and others in the currency of pounds, shillings and pence, or the emission of certain paper money bills. Of the “silver dollars” there can be no question as to their value.

History of Lotteries and the Lottery System in Rhode Island - No. 5
(*Manufacturers and Farmers Journal* – December 8, 1856)

The practice of asking aid from the General Assembly, by lottery grants, continued with the opening of the new century. The first on record is a grant to the Episcopal church in Bristol, to enable it to raise \$4,000 “for building a glebe house upon their farm, for repairing the church and discharging their debts.” Other lotteries were granted in 1800, and during the ten years that followed, to the First Congregational Society in Barrington, to raise \$2,000; to raise \$2,500 to build an academy in South Kingstown; to the Catholic Baptist Society in North Providence, to raise \$3,000, \$2,000 of which to be invested as a permanent fund; to St. John’s Lodge in Newport, to raise \$2,500 to complete their building; to Washington Academy to raise \$5,000, but for what particular purpose it is not stated; to raise \$1,200 for a school house and church in East Greenwich; \$2,000 for a church and school house in Charlestown; \$8,000 to deepen the channel of Apponaug river; \$1,000 for the Baptist meeting house in Johnston; \$8,000 to repair the Worcester road; \$2,500 for erecting a Baptist meeting house in Cranston; \$3,000 for Redwood library, Newport; to the Methodist Episcopal Church, Newport, to raise \$8,000; to John Slater and others, for building a meeting house in Smithfield, \$4,000.

In 1808, upon the petition of Perkins Nichols, a lottery was granted to raise \$10,000 to “defray the expenses of searching after coal,” indications of which had been found in various parts of the State. The Governor was authorized to appoint the managers of this lottery, and the money raised was to be expended under the direction of persons appointed by the General Assembly, who were to search after, dig and bore, in such places where indications existed, or which might be discovered.

In this and the three following years grants to raise money were made to the Warwick and Coventry Baptist Society to raise \$2,000; to erect an academy in North Providence \$875; and to the Smithfield Academic Society, \$2,000.

At the October session, 1809, Benjamin Waite Case presented a petition setting forth that he had “expended large sums of money, and incurred heavy responsibilities, in searching for coal on the island of Rhode Island, with flattering appearances that the fruits of his enterprise, if persevered in, will be attended with much public benefit and praying for relief.” The General Assembly acceded to Mr. Case’s request, and authorized him to raise \$10,000 by lottery.

Two years later a lottery grant was made to Wm. Pitt Sands and Nathaniel G. Sands, of Block Island, to raise “the *clear and neat* sum of \$10,000,” to enable them “to erect a stone pier off their landing, so as to form a spacious and secure harbor for all vessels not drawing more than twelve feet of water.” The same year, on the petition of James Rhodes, Nicholas Brown, and James B. Mason, in behalf of the corporation of Brown University, a lottery was granted authorizing them to raise \$20,000 by lottery, “to be applied to the building of a house for the accommodation of the steward, and generally to promote the objects of said institution.”

The “coal fever” seems to have run high at this time. First, in the year 1812, was a grant to the “Aquidneck Coal Company,” to raise \$30,000 by lottery, the managers of which lottery were required to give bond in the sum of \$200,000 for the faithful discharge of their duty. This company was required to relinquish all right to raise money by the lottery previously granted to Mr. Waite Case in 1809. They were also authorized to obtain permission from the State of New York to sell their tickets in that State. Amendments were made to this act at the June session following, and additional managers appointed in New York. The same year a grant was made to Elisha Waterman, Benjamin G. and Zenio W. Dexter, of Cumberland, “proprietors of the coal mine in that town,” to enable them to raise \$5,000, “to carry on the business of digging and exploring for coal in said town, “and another to the “Rhode Island Coal Company,” authorizing it to raise by lottery the sum of \$40,000, giving bonds in the sum of \$300,000, conditioned that all the money raised by the lottery should be expended in working the coal mines of the company in this State. There was a condition appended to this, “that permission be obtained from the Legislature of Massachusetts, to sell the tickets within that State.”

In 1814 a lottery was granted to St. John Church, in Providence, to raise \$10,000, but for what particular object, the act does not state. The managers of this lottery were Thomas L. Halsey, Ephraim Bowen, Sullivan Dorr, J. B. Wood and Wm. Blodget. The following year a grant was made to raise \$4000 “to be applied towards filling and completing a certain street called Water street, lately laid out in the northerly part of Providence commencing at Smith’s Bridge; and continuing down towards Weybosset Bridge, to the Rhode Island Bridge Company to raise \$25,000, the particulars in which are probably given in the petition, they are not stated in the act.

In 1815 an effort was made to suppress the sale of tickets in lotteries not authorized by law. This was doubtless to protect “home institutions,” as vast numbers of tickets in the lotteries granted by other States were sold in Rhode Island, thereby lessening the sale of those in the State lotteries. An act was therefore passed requiring the Attorney General to prosecute offenders. But it would appear that this did not work well, and was an infringement of private rights; the consequence was the repeal of the act at the October session following. For several years following the number of grants were very few, -why, we know not, unless foreign lotteries supplied the demand, or that there was a feeling growing up against them, as we notice no more grants for five years, or until 1820, when a grant was made to the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry to enable it to raise \$12,000 by lottery. This was followed by a grant the next year to the Pacific Congregational Society to raise \$5000.

The city of Washington, in the year 1822, petitioned the legislature to pass an act authorizing the sale within Rhode Island, of tickets, in any lottery authorized for public purposes, in that city. The only action on this was to notify the mayor of Washington that there was no law of this State prohibiting the sale of tickets in any authorized lottery.

The Free Will Baptist Society had liberty this year to raise \$2000 by lottery, to erect a meeting house. The West Baptist Society, in Providence, to raise \$3000 for a similar purpose. The Rhode Island Domestic Industry Society, to raise the additional sum of

\$8000. The next year a grant was made to Old Warwick to raise \$7000 to aid in “erecting houses for religious worship and for the education of youth.” Another to Burrillville to raise \$2000 for the purpose of repairing the Buck Hill Road; and a third to raise \$8000 for making improvements in the Cumberland and Worcester road.

The only business in this way the next year was a trifling grant to the Baptist Society in Coventry to raise \$500; to the town of Portsmouth, to raise \$1,000, to make a road over the beach leading to Charity Bridge; and to the Fourth Baptist Society in Providence, to raise \$2,000.

In 1825, the lottery grants were numerous, and to raise large sums of money. They include the following; To build a bridge near Central Falls, leave was given to raise \$5,000. To the Trustees of the Society’s Meeting House, Scituate, to raise \$2,500. To erect a wharf in Church’s Cove, near Seaconnet Point, \$2,000. To Redwood Library, Newport, to raise \$6,000 instead of \$3,000, for which a grant was made some years previous. To raise \$10,000 for the support of Public Schools in Newport. To sundry purposes in Westerly to raise \$4,000 for finishing the Union Meeting House in that town. To the Providence Franklin Society to raise \$10,000. To build a School House in Richmond, \$1,000, and to build a Masonic Hall in Wickford, \$4,000.

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